

ARIZONA VETERANS' SERVICE ADVISORY COMMISSION
4141 N. Third Street, Phoenix AZ 85012
Thursday – December 11, 2008

M I N U T E S

Call to Order - The meeting was called to order a 10.00 a.m. by Chairman Yamanouchi.

Present

Advisory Commissioners

Kenneth Yamanouchi, Chairman
Linda Fulkerson, Vice Chairman
Gary Fredricks
Phillip Quochytewa
Larry McKim
Bill Lunsford
George Cushing
Terrie Gent

Arizona Department of Veterans' Services

Joey Strickland, Director
Robert Barnes, Deputy Director
Mike Klier, Asst. Director, Veterans
Services Division
Dave Hampton, Public Information Officer
Tom Creager, AZ State Veteran Home
Administrator
Gabe Forsberg, Strategic Plans
Lee Borgen, Veterans' Benefits Counselor

Absent

Thomas Heaney

Guests

Joan Sisco, President, Veterans First Ltd (VFL)
CW4 Jody Reidenhour, AZ Army Nat'l Guard

Opening: Chairman Yamanouchi opened the meeting at 10:00 a.m. with appropriate ceremony.

Minutes:

1. The minutes of November 15, 2008 were approved as distributed.
(Moved by Commissioner McKim and seconded by Commissioner Cushing)
2. The minutes of November 20, 2008 were approved as distributed.
(Moved by Commissioner McKim and seconded by Commissioner Fulkerson)

Communications: none

Agency Announcements:

1. Director Strickland
 - He attended the local Pearl Harbor Day ceremony; there was a good turnout.
 - He attended dedication of the Armed Forces Park in Yuma; there was a good crowd.
 - He met with many of the leaders of the local veterans' organizations soliciting greater participation and support of functions for the residents of the State Veteran Home (Home).
 - The American Legion Riders visited the residents at the Home on Saturday, December 6th bringing gifts and everyone had a wonderful time.
 - The Department's Veterans' Benefits Counselor work force reflects the diversity of Arizona's veteran population and all counties are appropriately served.
 - The Department received \$750,000.00 from the State to help homeless veterans. The first project will focus on homeless women veterans. The homeless veterans' project will be handled through Veterans' First Limited (VFL).
 - Renovation of the State Veteran Cemetery at Sierra Vista is moving towards completion and the Veterans' Benefits Counselor's office will be moving out of the Cemetery complex.
 - ADVS is developing specific programs within the Agency to address Homeless Veterans, Women Homeless Veterans and the Military Family Relief Fund.

- ADVS is going to collaborate with the Guard and Reserve in the new Yellow Ribbon program for Arizona. This program will ensure support for Guard and Reserve members before, during and after deployment in addition to support for the families during the member's absence. The goal is for everyone to know what benefits and entitlements are available and where and how to access them. CWO4 Jody Reidenhour, from the Army National Guard, is in charge of the Yellow Ribbon program for Arizona and will provide a program overview. When she retires from the Guard next year she will head up the Departments' participation in the Yellow Ribbon program for Arizona.

2. Tom Creager

- The American Legion Riders' visit was very exciting. They brought 200 DVD players (with the required accessories for hookup), and 1000 CD's for the residents viewing enjoyment. This was in conjunction with an excellent barbeque plus entertainment. The American Legion Riders also presented the Home with a check for \$2,100. It was a truly wonderful day for everyone.
- The Arizona Medical Board visited the residents of the Home bringing gifts and entertainers. Everyone again had a wonderful time.
- Mr. Creager gave a brief overview (with handouts) on some new procedures being implemented to enhance overall operational performance in the Home.

2. CWO 4 Jody Reidenhour

- She is in charge of the Deployment Support and Reintegration Team for Arizona National Guard.
- Since 2006 it has been noted that members of the guard and reserve who serve in deployed status do not receive the same benefits as their regular military active duty counterparts.
- The National Defense Authorization Act 2008 mandated the establishment of a highly proactive outreach system that would address a very broad spectrum of both existing and potential issues that may confront guard and reserve members and/or their families at any time throughout the mobilization/deployment cycle.
- Chief Reidenhour provided a comprehensive handout to all in attendance. She noted that the Yellow Ribbon program is an extremely ambitious endeavor. To work to maximum potential it needs proactive support at all levels including ADVS, veterans, veterans' service organizations and the civilian community.
- Deputy Director Barnes noted that a comprehensive directory of services is being developed that will be distributed to all deploying personnel and their families, letting them know what is available and where to go, or who to contact, to get what they want or need.
- Chairman Yamanouchi noted that guard personnel activated to serve on the Mexican border, under the direction of Homeland Security, are not being given credit towards GI bill education benefits. They are only getting pay and retirement points. This would appear to be a significant inequity. Director Strickland will take this for action.

Notice on Rulemaking Docket Opening: Gabe Forsberg

1. This involves formalizing the rules for the operation of Arizona's Military Family Relief Fund, to include establishing an appeal process for applicants who may be denied assistance. This will ensure equity in assistance provided and that the fund is in full compliance with State laws.
2. There will be a public hearing on this issue on January 6, 2009 in the Home's conference room. The exact time has yet to be determined.
3. Upon completion, the rules will be published in the State's Administrative Register. Mrs. Forsberg will provide copies for the Commissioners when they are published.

VFL report: Commissioner Fredericks introduced Joan Sisco, President of VFL.

1. American Legion Riders, Patriot Guard and Buffalo Soldier motorcycle groups have all been to the Home to visit the residents. These groups are extremely involved; ready and willing to help with anything that has to do with veterans. Their flexibility with short lead times is wonderful.
2. The State legislature is in favor of funding the completion of the Enduring Freedom Memorial. The memorial itself is complete and in storage. The recurring delays have involved the base that the memorial will sit on.
3. The legislature extended the completion deadline to March 2011 but everyone is hopeful that the dedication will be much sooner. The current target date is next fall.
4. It has been noted that corporations do not appear to be very interested in donating for memorials. When donation requests fit their corporate guidelines, the interest appears to be in things that actively support troops and veterans, rather than erecting statues.
5. The State has made \$150,000 available for completion and maintenance of the Enduring Freedom Memorial.
6. ADVS has been given \$750,000, from a large grant received by the Arizona State Land Department to address the issue of homeless veterans in Arizona. VFL, working with the Community Housing Partnership, has set a target date of March 2009 to open the first facility in Arizona for homeless women veterans. The March target date is intended to coincide with this State's first Women Veterans' Conference to be held in Phoenix.
7. Commissioner Gent asked if the \$750,000 grant would be used throughout Arizona or just in Maricopa County. Miss Sisco advised that the money will be used throughout the state in ways appropriate to the homeless situation in the area being evaluated. Phoenix is just the first project. Shelters for men already exist around the State and male veterans can use them, but there is very little in the way of appropriate housing for homeless women. That is why homeless women veterans are being addressed first.
8. Miss Sisco asked to be put on the Advisory Commission's February meeting agenda to give an update on the housing for homeless women veterans.

Veterans' Mountain proposal: The consensus of the Commission was that this issue was dealt with during the November 20, 2008 conference-call meeting.

Region 3 Meeting 01/10/09: Commissioner McKim advised that everything is on track. He expects representation from the Tucson VA Medical Center, Federal and State legislative offices, county and city officials and local veterans' service organizations. The social meeting (dinner) is planned for 6:00 p.m. on Friday night in the hotel.

Review of Follow up Actions – no action required at this time.

Review Commission's Operationalization Plan: Commissioner Fredricks gave a quick overview of the changes he made based on the feedback he received. In the interests of time constraints a detailed review of the changes was deferred to the February 2009 meeting. However Chairman Yamanouchi noted that the Plan was approved in principle in November and is to be used in planning the regional outreach meetings.

Public comments: none

Comments for the good of the Commission:

1. Commissioner Fredricks observed that the Unified Arizona Veterans', in light of current events involving the Governor's office, voted to send a letter supporting the retention of Director Strickland as the head of the Arizona Department of Veterans' Services. Director Strickland noted that he will be providing a State of the State report to the Governor on December 15th that will reinforce the Agency's accomplishments, current status and goals.

Chairman Yamanouchi advised that he will draft a support letter and will set up a special meeting of the Advisory Commission via conference-call to discuss the issue in detail.

2. Commissioner McKim advised that the Historic Soldiers' Relocation Program is progressing well. It is on track for completion of construction in March 2009 with the re-interment ceremony on May 16, 2009 at 10:00 a.m. This project has gained national attention and there is a lot of interest in the ceremony.

Adjournment: Chairman Yamanouchi adjourned the meeting at 12:14 p.m. (Moved by commissioner Fulkerson and seconded by Commissioner McKim.) The next meeting will be held at 10:00 a.m. on January 10, 2009 at Clarion Hotel, 6801 S. Tucson Blvd, Tucson, Arizona.

Respectfully submitted,

S. Lee Borgen
Secretary